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THE SECOND PHASE OF THE BATTLE OF CUNAXA

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For a vivid word-picture of a battle scene Xenophon's account of Cunaxa is scarcely to be surpassed. Plutarch¹ remarks that while others have reported it, Xenophon all but shows it to our vision; his narrative puts the reader in a position to share the sufferings and dangers, not of past events, but of events in their happening. His description, the narrative of an eyewitness in a position to see what was to be seen, arouses no such uncomfortable suspicion as that which haunts us when we read Livy's battle pieces. We feel that we have before us what actually transpired on that particular occasion, not what frequently or usually happens on such occasions—that we have before us the specific, not the generic. In Livy, as Taine observed, many of the details, while true, are perfectly commonplace. They do not belong in any account, because they would be true in every account.

Yet with all the superiority of Xenophon's descriptions, there is one of Livy's most annoying faults from which he cannot be fully absolved. It is rather characteristic of Livy to fix his attention on some special feature of a battle, while neglecting some other, often a more important, part. Fortunately for his reputation, he so charms us by his narrative that we often fail to detect his delinquency until we try to draw a plan of the battle. At Cannae, he inveigles the Roman center into one of Hannibal's traps and then passes to describe the fortunes of the right wing, leaving us quite uninformed, if distinctly apprehensive, regarding the precise fate of the center. Nor does he deign to explain how Hasdrubal, who opened the battle in command of the Carthaginian left, came at its close to be in command of the right,² though Polybius, in most respects an inferior historian, makes it clear enough.

¹ *Artaxerxes* 8.

² Livy xxii. 48. 5.

In his account of Cunaxa, Xenophon describes vividly and circumstantially the opening phase of the battle in which Cyrus' right routed the king's left, but he fails to make clear what befell the troops of Gobryas and Arbaces at the center and right of the royal army. It is usually assumed¹ that the center and right wheeled to encircle the troops of Ariaeus, pursued them to the camp of Cyrus, plundered it, and then returned to face the Greeks in the second phase of the battle as described in *Anabasis* i. 10.9-15.

In a recent issue of the *Classical Journal*² I have accepted and developed the view of Colonel Boucher,³ that the enveloping movement mentioned in *Anabasis* i. 8.23 was to be performed, not by the king's center and right, but by the six thousand picked cavalry which alone could deliver such a blow with the requisite promptness and speed. It would follow that the pursuit and the plundering of the camp would be performed by this relatively small body of cavalry. It would be very doubtful if the king's center and right took any share even in the second phase of the battle.

Plutarch gives us no help. He mentions neither the plundering of Cyrus' camp, nor any engagement except the first shock. Diodorus⁴ informs us that the camp was plundered by that part of the Persian force which was under the king's command. This might mean the whole center; it might equally well indicate the cavalry bodyguard. Diodorus distinctly recognizes the second phase of the battle. Toward night,⁵ he tells us, those who had plundered the camp, collected and set out against the Greeks, but were conquered and put to flight. It is obvious that neither in Xenophon, Plutarch,⁶ nor Diodorus have we any statement

¹ Goodwin and White (*Anabasis* xlix) say that the king with his center and right plundered the Greek camp. Smith, Rehdantz-Carnuth, etc., imply by their language, or by the plans that they give, substantially the same view. Indeed few, if any, editions are free from the implication.

² *Classical Journal*, XIV, 248.

³ This French officer published in 1913 an extremely suggestive study, *L'Anabase de Xenophon*.

⁴ xiv. 24. 3: οἱ . . . μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως ταχθέντες. ⁵ *Ibid.*: ἥδη νυκτὸς ἐπελθούσης.

⁶ Plutarch (*Artax.* 13) says that after the death of Cyrus some 70,000 men rallied around the king and took him back to his camp.

that the royal center and right played the part usually ascribed to them.

What, then, did they do? They fled at the first shock, Boucher would answer. Consequently, of all the Persian army, only the cavalry bodyguard of Artaxerxes and the detachment under Tissaphernes that broke through the Greek light-armed force along the river assumed the offensive at any stage of the engagement.

We may well hesitate to accept this without further discussion. It is an obvious objection that, while Xenophon mentions the collapse of the Persian left, he says nothing about the defeat of the center and right. Boucher¹ would reply that his failure to do so was intentional. His object was to accentuate the value of the Greeks and emphasize their part in winning the battle. Obviously, this would be lessened if it transpired that those who were not the direct objects of the Greek attack broke and fled as precipitately as those against whom it was directly delivered. This is not convincing. Xenophon could easily have made it clear to the veriest tyro in tactics that the flight of the center and right was directly due to the Greek attack, which had torn a tremendous hole in their left and had exposed the rest to attack on the flank and rear. More likely he took it for granted that everyone would know what a Persian line would do under such circumstances, or else he was so interested in the Greeks that he forgot to mention the fate of an unimportant factor in the action.

There are, however, several considerations which seem to support Boucher's view that all the infantry fled. These must be taken into account before a decision can be reached. He himself uses none of them. To the military mind the case is possibly clear enough without them; to the civilian they are distinctly helpful, if not necessary.

Prominent among them is the question of time and distance, about which we have adequate, though by no means full, information. The two fixed facts are: (1) When the barbarians were plundering the camp of Cyrus the Greeks were some three miles down stream.² (2) The Persians disappeared from the hill to the

¹ *L'Anabase*, p. 93.

² *Anab.* i. 10. 4.

base of which the Greeks had pursued them, just about sunset, which for latitude 33° north, on September 3,¹ would be 6 h. 24 m., local apparent time.²

Half-past six, then, is the *terminus ante quem*. The *terminus post quem* is harder to fix, though on the face of it Xenophon is fairly explicit. He gives us the following data: (1) At noon the enemy were not yet in sight.³ (2) The first visual token of their appearance was a white dust cloud which was seen *ἡνίκα—δείλη ἐγίγνετο*.⁴ (3) A long time later,⁵ the mass of men was seen looming through the dust like a sort of wide-extended blackness upon the plain.

Now, if we had but these facts we should inevitably conclude that the battle took place well toward evening. The white cloud must have appeared, we should say, about three o'clock. The word *δείλη* in classical Greek means "late afternoon"; sometimes the connotation of lateness is very distinct. Liddell and Scott give several examples of its use to indicate any time after noon. But some of their examples will not permit such an interpretation; none of them, unless it be this, require it.⁶

In this instance, however, we are fairly driven to assume that *δείλη* means considerably earlier in the day than it usually does in other writers and even in Xenophon himself. For it was a long succession of events that occurred before sunset. Let us try to get some very general idea of the time that these would consume.

To do this, we must first estimate the speed of the Persian line of battle. It seems to have been drawn up in mass formation,

¹ This is the earliest date assigned to the battle; if it came later, say on September 15, the afternoon would be shorter yet.

² This information was afforded me by the kindness of my friend Carl Leo Stearns, assistant in the Van Vleck Observatory of Wesleyan University.

³ i. 8.8.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *χρόνῳ - συχνῶ ὕστερον (ibid.).*

⁶ For instance, in Xen. *Anab.* ii. 2. 14, they lay stress on the contrast between *ὁψέ* (16) and *δείλην*, whereas the former need be very little later than the latter. In Herodotus (ix. 101) they interpret *περὶ δείλην*, "right after noon"; Rawlinson, more correctly, I think, renders it "towards evening." In two passages from Thucydides (iv. 69 and iv. 103) where Liddell and Scott eliminate the idea of lateness, Jowett translates "towards evening." In still another of their instances (Xen. *Anab.* vii. 3. 10) the context strongly suggests lateness.

about one hundred deep.¹ Obviously, in such a formation the speed of troops would be slower than in column. The speed of a modern column varies with the character of the road and the size of the command, the rate being greater for a small than for a large body. With trained troops, in commands of a regiment or less, marching over average roads, the rate as laid down by the *United States Infantry Drill Regulations* (§ 633) is from two and three-quarters to three miles per hour. With larger commands, carrying full equipment, the rate prescribed is from two to two and one-half miles per hour. This, be it remembered, is for troops in column of squads, at route step. Certainly, then, two miles per hour is a high maximum for a Persian phalanx of over half a million men, in line one hundred deep, marching across country, with no roads. I shall, however, to be on the safe side, make my estimates on the hypothesis that such a line could cover two miles per hour.

The first sign of the enemy's approach was a dust cloud. The Greeks were peering intently across a level plain and one would suppose that such a force, or the dust cloud that accompanied it, could have been seen at a distance of three miles. It would then be an hour and a half before the forces would come into contact, for the Greeks had stopped their advance about eleven o'clock and resumed it only to attack. Suppose δελγη to mean the early hour of two; the attack would have been delivered about half-past three; the death of Cyrus would take place, say, about a quarter-past four; the pillage of the camp of Cyrus, perhaps a mile in the rear, would have to be crowded into an hour—half-past four to half-past five. The return over three miles of country to where the second phase of the battle took place, the second Greek attack, the pursuit,² the wait at the foot of the hill while the Persian cavalry evacuated the summit, the reconnoissance of Lycius and his report would have to be crowded into an hour. We need a great deal more time and are driven to assume that

¹ See *Classical Journal*, XIV, 239 f.

² If the hill were the Pebbly Ridge, as Boucher supposes (and really there seems little choice in such a flat land), the pursuit from a point near the river must have covered over three miles.

the dust cloud appeared as early as one o'clock. We need not say that *δελη* means "early afternoon," but that Xenophon thought the dust cloud appeared a great deal later than it did. Everyone knows how the afternoon drags when he has had no lunch. This was precisely the situation of the Greeks.¹ By the time it was one o'clock it may well have seemed like four.

Let us consider, then, whether, even supposing the dust cloud appeared at one and that the battle began at half-past two, there would be time for the movement usually supposed by which the king's center and right pursued the troops of Ariaeus, plundered the camp of Cyrus, returned with the cavalry to engage the Greeks in the second phase of the battle and to flee before them, all before the sun set at half-past six.

Our fundamental fact here is the distance between the point where the second phase of the battle was fought and the situation of the plundered camp. This we know was three miles.² Whether the original battleground was equidistant between these two points we do not know. I incline to think that it was nearer the camp of Cyrus, perhaps one mile distant.³ In that case the Persian phalanx marches one mile, falls out and plunders the camp, falls in, and marches three miles to participate in the second phase of the battle. How long would this take? Two hours would be consumed in marching only. The plundering, done by such numbers, would certainly not take long, but anyone who has seen a mere regiment assemble and fall in, after its units have become ever so slightly mixed, will have some idea how many hours would be required to recall several hundred thousand men from plunder, "fall them in," one hundred deep, and begin their march in line. Be it observed that if they had never fallen out and had not plundered the camp, the mere march of four miles would consume more time than can possibly be found for it in such a crowded afternoon.

The conclusion seems inevitable that the enveloping movement and the plunder of the Cyreian camp must have been performed by the six thousand cavalry, not by the massed infantry

¹ *Anab.* i. 10. 19.

² *Anab.* i. 10. 4.

³ If, as Boucher seems to think (p. 79), the second phase was fought on the same ground as the first, the Persian infantry would have to march six miles instead of four.

of the king's center and right. It follows that Xenophon makes no mention whatever of their function or their fate. This is curious, if they remained in position. They would then be directly in the path of the royal cavalry on its return from Cyrus' camp and the cavalry would naturally effect a junction with them. Nothing is said of this. The king picked up certain deserters and had joined forces with Tissaphernes and his cavalry, apparently in the plundered camp.

We must then face the possibility that the whole infantry force of Artaxerxes was routed in the first battle and that the Persian army which confronted the Greeks in the second phase was composed very largely of cavalry, the six thousand of the king's bodyguard, plus the cavalry of Tissaphernes. We have been led to this conclusion by the difficulty of finding time for the maneuvers of a large body of infantry. There are certain things in Xenophon's account of the second phase which are perhaps most easily explained in the same way.

The Persians fled at the first onset. One can well imagine what a scene of confusion their flight must have presented if they were really several hundred thousand infantry drawn up one hundred deep. The Greeks should have overtaken them easily and have inflicted monstrous losses upon them.¹ The Greeks halted at the base of a hill. By the time the Greeks arrived, this was covered with cavalry; no infantry were to be seen. Could half a million infantry have made so complete a get-away? The cavalry left the hill gradually, probably *en échelon*, and reconnaissance developed the fact that they, probably the last echelons, were fleeing at full speed. It looks as if few infantry were involved.

There are two things which may seem to point to an opposite conclusion. One is the word *φάλαγγα* (i. 10.10). It need not, however, mean an infantry mass. It can denote any line of battle. Let us consider the whole passage. The Greeks, still facing downstream, had discovered that the king was coming up in their rear. They faced upstream to receive him. He passed

¹ Diodorus (xiv. 24.4) does say that the Greeks killed many of the foe, but he seems to be including in his statement the victims of the first contest. The figures he gives in the next section are about what we might expect the Persian casualties in that action to be.

by their (left, become) right or exposed wing, thus putting them in a position of extreme peril. As a countermove, the Greeks planned ἀναπτύσσειν τὸ κέρας, whatever that may mean. Meanwhile the king altered his formation and opposed to the Greeks a phalanx, as in the first phase of the battle.

Why should the king change his formation? Obviously, to bring it from column into line. On the view that he was bringing with him several hundred thousand men to attack in great depth an opposing force, he must have had them in line. A column containing that many men would extend for many miles and would take a long time to bring into line.¹ If, on the other hand, the king had a matter of ten thousand cavalry, they could advance at a slow trot along whatever road there was, in column (ἐπὶ κέρως), and change to line (ἐπὶ φάλαγγος) when attack was imminent.

I interpret the passage to mean, then, that the royal cavalry advanced in column, not directly against the Greeks, but to their right, perpendicular to the line on which the Greeks stood. When the head of the column reached a point well to the rear of the Greeks, a simple command, which could be executed very quickly, transformed the column into line, the formation in which the Greeks were, and changed the Persian front so as to attack the Greek flank, for, certainly, with the Greek right flank exposed, the king would never think of frontal attack.² But the Greeks

¹ Cyrus' handful of Greeks had consumed from two to three hours to form their columns into line that very morning.

² Even before the present writer tried his hand, this passage had suffered many things of many physicians. It has been felt that the Greek attack must have been parallel with the river and that the line they attacked must have faced downstream. To effect this (1) a strange meaning must be given to παραμειψάμενος, "having changed his direction," instead of "having passed by"; (2) the Persian masses must advance at a right oblique (see plan on page 103 of Mather and Hewitt's *Anabasis*), which would be very difficult, and the Greeks must have attacked at an angle in order not to expose too completely their right flank (on the difficulty of oblique attack see Bauer, *Griechische Kriegsaltertümer*, p. 325); (3) it requires us to render εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ σχῆμα, "into the same position," instead of "into the same formation." To be sure σχῆμα does not seem to be a technical military term. It does not appear in the index of Bauer's *Kriegsaltertümer*. But the ordinary use of the word ("shape") suggests "formation" rather than "position." Aristotle uses it of a geometrical figure (*De anima* ii. 3). I find no instance where it must mean "position." On the other hand I have run across one passage where Plutarch uses it to describe the change in the shape of the Carthaginian force at Cannae; *Fabius* 16: ἡ δὲ φάλαγξ τοῦ Ἀννίβου μεταβαλοῦσα τὸ σχῆμα μηροειδὲς ἐγεγόνει.

charged impetuously and the Persians did not wait to try conclusions.

This assumes, of course, that the Greeks had carried out what they were planning, at least so far as to put the river in their rear and face the Persians. I have not the tactical knowledge to discuss intelligently the various meanings suggested for ἀναπτύσσειν τὸ κέρας,¹ but the Greeks' object clearly was to present a front, not a flank, to the foe. So far as ἀναπτύσσειν τὸ κέρας is concerned, Xenophon does not say that the movement was carried out, nor does he say it was not. Whether precisely that thing was done depends upon what that phrase means, but everybody would know without being told that to meet an attack upon a flank a line must face the threatened attack. I favor Boucher's view that the Greek line pivoted on its center, a maneuver which he estimates would consume about ten minutes, though I am not ready to agree with him that such a movement is all that is meant by ἀναπτύσσειν τὸ κέρας.

The second difficulty is the words πεζοὶ μὲν οὐκέτι in section 12. On any interpretation they are puzzling. Grammatically they stand in apposition with οἱ ἀμφὶ βασιλέα, which seems to mean "the royal bodyguard."² We must render, then, "the king's bodyguard rallied, no longer on foot, but the hill was covered with men on horseback." I used to think the passage meant that when the cavalry of the bodyguard rallied the hill was covered with horsemen, no longer, as it had been shortly before, with infantry. This would allow for a considerable body or even a preponderance of infantry among the fugitives, but it is not what Xenophon says. If Xenophon wrote what he meant, we should have to suppose that when the bodyguard rallied, it was no longer, as it had been previously, on foot.

This interpretation would involve the supposition that the horsemen had dismounted for some reason. Xenophon supposes

¹ A mere lengthening of the front (Bauer, *op. cit.*, 331, N 2); a pivoting on a flank (Vollbrecht, *Anabasis*, p. 25); a pivoting on the center (Boucher, *op. cit.*, p. 80); for the literature see Droysen, *Heerwesen und Kriegführung der Griechen*, p. 47, N 2.

² That is, the 6,000 cavalry. See *Anab.* i. 8. 26 and 27 and compare 8.21, 8.25 and οἱ ἀμφὶ αὐτοὺς 8.27.

that the king was with his troops all this time.¹ If this were so, it may have been necessary for the cavalry to dismount for his protection as the cavalry of the wounded Aemilius Paulus at Cannae dismounted to protect him.² If the king's wound were slight, a little first aid might enable him to continue on the field, even if he were obliged to surrender the active command to Tissaphernes. Especially after the flight of the infantry, it was of vital importance to convince the troops in the field that the monarch was alive. Even a comparatively slight wound in the breast might become troublesome in three hours. The king might be in no condition to endure a gallop or a trot and would have to be sent from the field at a walk. To cover his retreat the cavalry would have to dismount, for at this period cavalry were supposed to be unable to contend on equal terms with infantry at close quarters.³ Only when the Greeks broke contact with them at the foot of the hill would it be possible for the cavalry to remount. The above seems to me one, if not the best, possible explanation of Xenophon's words. But both Xenophon's words and my explanation are quite inconsistent with Plutarch's account of the king's movements and with his statement that the king had a wound two fingers deep. As Plutarch knows nothing of the second phase of the battle, I cannot feel that his account is as trustworthy as that of an eyewitness.

I may add one further consideration which supports the view that when Clearchus delivered his first attack, the panic that ensued affected more than the Persian left. Xenophon⁴ says that when Cyrus saw the Greeks pursuing the part opposite them, not even so was he induced to pursue. To pursue what? Naturally the part opposite him, the right part of the center division. Was it then in flight? A demoralized and panic-stricken left, when it turned to flee, would inevitably communicate its terror to the center. The only question is, How far toward the right would the panic extend? The Greeks, having torn a wide gap

¹ He tells us that the royal standard was recognized on the hill (i. 10. 12), but this is not absolutely conclusive.

² Livy xxii. 49. 1-3.

³ Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 354, N 1.

⁴ *Anab.* i. 8. 21.

in the Persian line, were in a position to roll the center back on the right and inflict serious losses. It is hard to see how the center could maintain itself in position. Between the first and second phases of the battle it might recover from its panic. Whether the commingled units could be disentangled and reorganized¹ on the field with the enemy not far away, I cannot say, but I doubt it. I suspect that very few of the Persian infantry were in that part of the king's force which faced the Greeks in the second phase of the battle of Cunaxa.

¹ Neither here nor elsewhere do I assume an elaborate unitary organization of the Persian phalanx, but some organization there must have been (Rawlinson, *Fifth Monarchy*, chap. iii, notes 109 ff.). It certainly was not a mere unorganized horde.